In vitro activity and pharmacological properties of IDX375, a novel HCV non-nucleoside inhibitor

INTRODUCTION

- Hepatitis C virus (HCV) is a common blood-borne pathogen annually infecting three to four million people worldwide. Currently, an estimated 170 million people are infected globally, representing a nearly 5-fold greater prevalence than human immunodeficiency virus.
- The current standard-of-care therapy, a combination of pegylated interferon and ribavirin, is effective in only 50% of patients infected with genotype 1 HCV and is associated with significant side effects. Thus, there remains a need for new, more effective and better tolerated HCV treatment options.
- The HCV polymerase has been an attractive antiviral target. Nucleoside analogs, or more recently pro-nucleotides such as IDX184, target the active site of the enzyme while multiple classes of non-nucleoside polymerase inhibitors (NNIs) target different allosteric sites in the enzyme.
- IDX375 is a novel NNI developmental candidate that targets the palm pocket of the NS5B polymerase.
- This study evaluated the *in vitro* biochemical and cell-based activities of IDX375, and its pharmacokinetic profile in the rat and the monkey.

METHODS

Biochemical assays: IC_{50}, inhibitory constant (K_i) and Michaelis constants (K_M) were determined by standard methods. Human polymerase activity was determined by measuring the incorporation of α [^{33}P] dNMP using activated calf thymus DNA as template.

HCV replicon assay: Huh-7 cells stably expressing a replicon containing the luciferase transgene were seeded onto 96-well plates, cultured for 3 days in the presence of drug and subjected to a luciferase assay. Cytotoxicity was measured by MTS in GS4.1, Huh-7 or HepG2 cells after 3 or 9 days of treatment.

HCV *in vitro* infection assays: HPC cells were infected with JFH-1 HCV (genotype 2a) and treated with serial drug dilutions. After 16 hours, virus inoculum was removed and cultures were incubated with drug for 3 days. Drug susceptibility was determined by ELISA using an anti-HCV core mAb.

Long-term treatment assay: GS4.1 cells stably expressing a bicistronic HCV replicon were cultured in the presence of drug, but without G418, for 14 days. Cells were split, RNA was collected every 3-4 days and replicon RNA levels were measured by RT-qPCR of the HCV 5'-UTR and normalized to GAPDH. Following 14-day treatment, cells were seeded onto 10 cm dishes in the absence of compound ± G418 for 21 days to determine the presence of the HCV replicon. The number of colonies in each plate was counted following staining with crystal violet in 50% ethanol.

Monkey and rat pharmacokinetics (PK): For the PK studies, serial plasma samples were obtained from male Sprague-Dawley rats and cynomolgus monkeys given single doses of IDX375 (2 mg/kg IV or 10 mg/kg PO, 2 animals per dose group). For tissue studies, samples of plasma and tissue were obtained from 2 cynomolgus monkeys. All samples were treated with acidified acetonitrile and concentrations of IDX375 were determined by reversed-phase LC-MS/MS.

RESULTS

Biochemical characterization of IDX375

Table 1: In vitro activity of IDX375 against HCV and human cellular polymerases

	HCV1a	HCV1b	DNA pol α	DNA pol β	DNA pol γ	RNA pol II
IC_{50} (µM)	0.030	0.018	>100	>100	>100	>100

Control inhibitors actinomycin D and ddGTP (DNA polymerase) and alpha amanitin (RNA polymerase II) gave expected results.

- As shown in **Table 1**, IDX375 inhibited HCV polymerases of genotypes 1a and 1b with submicromolar IC_{50} values, but did not inhibit human DNA polymerases α, β or γ or human RNA polymerase II.
- IDX375 did not inhibit HCV polymerases of genotypes 2a, 3a or 4a at concentrations up to 1 µM (data not shown).
- In biochemical experiments (data not shown), the choice of ^{33}P-NTP substrate did not affect the IC_{50} of IDX375; values ranged from 14 (^{33}P-ATP label) to 19 nM (^{33}P-UTP label).
- Kinetic analyses (data not shown) with the 1b HCV polymerase determined the K_i of IDX375 to be 40 nM, similar to the K_M values of the 4 nucleotides.
  - IDX375 was found to be a noncompetitive inhibitor with respect to the 4 nucleotide substrates.
  - Inhibition was mixed with respect to RNA template.

Activity against HCV in cell culture

Table 2: Activity of IDX375 in a standard HCV genotype 1b replicon assay

n	[illegible]	[illegible]	CC_{50} (µM)	Selectivity index
6	2.3	S	>100	>43,000

Luciferase reporter-based assay

- As seen in **Table 2**, IDX375 is a potent inhibitor of genotype 1b HCV replication with low cytotoxicity and excellent selectivity.
- In a variety of cell lines, IDX375 showed negligible cytotoxicity; in 9-day assays the CC_{50} of IDX375 was 88 µM in Huh-7 cells and >100 µM in HepG2 cells.
- The presence of 45% human serum increased the EC_{50} of IDX375 by 25-fold in the 1b luciferase replicon assay.
- The activity of IDX375 against the JFH-1 genotype 2a virus was lower, EC_{50} = 18.4 µM, using the core ELISA assay.

Long-term treatment of replicon cells with IDX375

- As shown in **Table 3** and **Figure 1**, longer term treatment with IDX375 achieved a 1.0 $\log_{10}$ reduction in replicon RNA at a 1x EC_{50} of IDX375 and a 3 $\log_{10}$ reduction at 20x EC_{50} of IDX375.

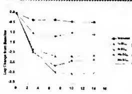
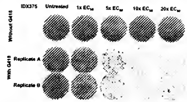


Table 3: Effect of 14-day treatment with IDX375 on replicon RNA

-	0.42
1	1.03
5	2.05
10	2.29
20	2.95

Values represent $\log_{10}$ reduction derived from averages from four independent experiments. $\log_{10}$ reduction was calculated by subtracting the average $\log_{10}$ copies HCV/GAPDH RNA of the sample at Day 14 from the average $\log_{10}$ copies HCV/GAPDH RNA of the untreated control at Day 0.

- This decline in HCV replicon was confirmed by further culture of the 14-day treated cells with G418 in the absence of compound (**Figure 2**).
- Without G418 selection pressure, replicons were eliminated and cells remained viable (top row). In the presence of G418, only HCV replicon-expressing colonies survived (bottom rows). The number of colonies reflects the efficacy of each treatment.



Quantitation of colonies shown above

-	>600	>600	>600	>600	>600
+	>600	>600	63	3	3
+	>600	>600	32	8	16

- As seen in **Figure 2**, the number of replicon colonies was reduced in a dose-dependent manner after 14-day treatment with IDX375.
- At 1x EC_{50}, the reduction in colonies was already visible and became marked at ≥ 5x EC_{50}.

Pharmacokinetic profile of IDX375

- Since the submission of the abstract, the PK profile of IDX375 has been refined in more detailed studies. The recent data are presented below.

Table 4: Plasma PK profile of IDX375 in the rat and monkey

2 mg/kg IV	Cl (L/h/kg)	2.5	0.24
	Vd (L/kg)	17	0.77
	$T_{1/2}$ (h)	4.6	2.3
10 mg/kg PO	C_{max} (nM)	860	4160
	T_{max} (h)	0.5 - 4.0	4.0
	Bioavailability (%)	101	28

- The oral bioavailability of IDX375 was good to excellent in rats and monkeys.
- After a 10 mg/kg oral dose, 8 h plasma levels in rats were 200-fold above the EC_{50} value obtained in the HCV genotype 1b replicon. At 24 h, drug levels remained 10- and 30-fold above the EC_{50} in rats and monkeys, respectively.
- IDX375 was selectively concentrated in liver; in monkeys, liver concentrations of IDX375 were approximately 50-fold greater than the corresponding plasma concentrations 24 h post-dose.
  - This accumulation was not observed in other tissues.

CONCLUSIONS

- IDX375 is a potent and selective noncompetitive inhibitor that targets the palm domain of the HCV NS5B enzyme.
- IDX375 inhibited HCV replication in an *in vitro* replicon assay with an EC_{50} value of 2.3 nM and a selectivity index of >43,000.
- IDX375 was not cytotoxic in test cell lines.
- Treatment of replicon cells with 20x EC_{50} of IDX375 for 14 days resulted in a 3 $\log_{10}$ reduction in HCV replicon RNA and reduced the number of replicon-containing foci in cell culture.
- The PK profile of IDX375 in the rat and the cynomolgus monkey shows adequate drug exposure in the systemic circulation. Moreover, the drug selectively concentrated in the liver.
- The preclinical PK profile of IDX375 suggests the potential for once-a-day dosing. After 24 h, plasma levels remained 10- to 30-fold above the EC_{50} in both rats and monkeys given single 10 mg/kg oral doses.
- Based on the *in vitro* antiviral potency and the exposure seen in animal PK studies, IDX375 is a promising candidate for clinical evaluation.

Acknowledgments

The authors would like to thank Dr. Christoph Seeger for the GS4.1 HCV replicon cell line and the HCV replicon cDNA construct ZS11, the Idenix Biology and DMPK groups for data and discussions, and Dr. Valérie Philippon, Teresa Dahlman and Steven Good for assistance with poster preparation.

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Presented at the 59th Annual AASLD, San Francisco, CA, October 31 – November 4, 2008

Disclosures: All authors are current employees of Idenix Pharmaceuticals, Inc.

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